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10 ORIENTATION--information especially likely to be needed by users of a file as a frame of reference for understanding the materials classified elsewhere; organization of the file, special coding decisions, and evaluation of the file.

GUIDE TO THE MP5 AMHARA FILE

[This file focuses on the Amhara, the politically and culturally dominant ethnic group of Ethiopia. The Amhara are located primarily in the central highland plateau of Ethiopia, and comprise the major population element in the provinces of Begemder and Gojjam, and in parts of Shoa and Wallo. In terms of the total Ethiopian population, however, the Amhara are in a numerical minority. Within the last decade, the national population has usually been placed at between 14 and 22 million; it is also generally estimated that the Amhara, together with the closely related Tigre, constitute about one-third of this total population (cf. Lipsky, G.A., et al. Ethiopia: its people, its society, its culture, 1962: 31-34). One of the most recent estimates gives the number of native speakers of Amharic, the language of the Amhara, about 7,800,000 (cf. Bender, M.L., The languages of Ethiopia, Anthropological Linguistics, 13, no. 5, 1971: 217). But most of these population figures should be regarded as crude approximations since there has never been a comprehensive national census.

Amharic is classified as an Ethiosemitic language which has been influenced by indigenous Cushitic languages. It is the official language of Ethiopia, and as such, Amharic has been an important factor in the Amharization of other ethnic groups through its required use in schools and government offices (11: Levine: 2-3) 1965: 2-3).

Major cultural patterns of the Amhara include the plow cultivation of cereal grains, with teff (Eragrostis abyssinica) being the staple crop; animal husbandry important, but secondary to agriculture; the Ethiopic alphabet; Ge'ez

literature; Monophysite Christianity, which has been present since the fourth century; extended patrilocal, patrilineal family groups; a traditional polity organized as a "feudal" kingdom; and a complex system of social stratification dominated by the royalty and a landed "feudal" nobility and clergy, and including, until a generation or so ago, a substratum of slaves. This cultural system is now caught up in a process of change, with, for instance, new élites emerging to challenge the old hierarchy (cf. 1: Messing, p. 399, 408 ff; 11: Levine: 1-2, chap. 5), and with the recent deposition of the emperor.

The political dominance of the Amhara in Ethiopia is manifested in the preponderance of Amhara in top political offices, and in the perpetuation of the Amhara monarchy. In fact, all but one of the emperors of Ethiopia have been Amhara since the beginning of what is called the restored Solomonid Dynasty in 1270 A.D. (11: Levine: 2).

The Amhara file presently consists of 12 sources, all in English. 1: Messing is a comprehensive, basic ethnography, and probably still ranks as the principal modern source. The author used the Outline of Cultural Materials as a field guide, and an extensive range and quantity of data are presented. His treatment is especially thorough with regard to healing practices and cults. 2: Allen is a brief treatment of geography and history, with incidental remarks on customs; 3: Buxton is of a similar nature, but particularly concerned with the area immediately about the city of Debra Berhan. 4: Alvarez and 5: Bruce are excerpts from the writings of travelers in the early sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries, respectively, and provide comments on many aspects of Amhara culture which may be compared with modern patterns; both were concerned mainly with religious practices. 6: Messing presents a sampling of

humorous folktales, whereas 7: Perham is a detailed description of political history and organization to 1935, with notes on 1945 conditions, including added information on land tenure and tribute. 8: Rey comments on various cultural features, among which are the calendar, clothing, diet, and ceremonial activities. 9: Coon is a descriptive and comparative work on physical anthropology drawn from the author's book on European races, while 10: Barkhuus is a description of medical problems in the area. 11: Levine is a thorough historical, sociological, anthropological and psychological analysis of traditional and modern Amhara culture. 12: Young describes Begemder Amhara medical beliefs and practices.

This file now contains large amounts of data on religion, medical and cult practices, but information on various other subjects, including kinship and social structure, is less adequate. The file is generally adequate for comparative purposes, however. The file was processed between 1959 and 1973.]